

Book Review: Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002, 180 pp., £12.99, hbk.); Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003, 144 pp., £12.99, hbk.)

Bernard Lewis has distilled his thoughts in both books with cogency (and some repetition from his recent works) to articulate the bewilderment, frustration and hopes of those who censure our trajectory vision of modernity.

What Went Wrong? surveys the ill-conceived solutions and consecutive failures of the Ottomans, legatees par excellence of the Arab faith; the rulers of South East Europe, North Africa and the Middle East; and Christendom's six-century-old rivalry in the economic, educational and cultural spheres. Interspersed with amusing and revealing vignettes, Lewis highlights the mixed results and foibles of human character.

Proximity and rivalry shaped the mutually conflicting imaginings of Muslims and Westerners whose impressions linger despite the waning of more opprobrious notions. Backsliding was acutely experienced first on the battlefield where external territories, followed by the empire's heartland, were lost to burgeoning European military superiority. The brusque candour among Ottomans about their failures, especially NamWk Kemal's sage observation on the status of women, is admirable (p. 70). Despite assumption of the trappings of modernity (technology, electoral process), and devising blueprints for sieving and blending attributes of Western liberalism with puritanical ideals, contemporary Islamists eschew revising the scriptural status quo to extend socio-doctrinal parity to women and minorities because the former violates the male's domestic superiority and social standing while the latter is tantamount to downgrading the primacy of Islam in this world and the next. The devil in the detail, then as now, is that the 'underlying philosophy and the sociopolitical context of these scientific achievements proved more difficult to accept or even to recognize' (p. 81). Lewis can skilfully portray features — unlike injudicious relativists and academics who deferentially gloss over iniquities in non-Western societies — with forthright accuracy, as for example (p. 63): 'In the West, one makes money in the market, and uses it to buy or influence power. In the East, one seizes power, and uses it to make money.' For 'vicegerent' read vice-regent (p. 97) Western art-form music certainly flourishes in East Asia but not South Asia where it is 'profoundly alien' except among 'Westernized enclaves' of anglicised Parsis, Christians and Jews (p. 136) A forceful sequel, *The Crisis of Islam* brings the story down to Usama bin Ladin's clarion call to slaughter 'Jews and Crusaders' and the September 11 tragedy. It occasionally reads like some thinly-concealed white paper exhorting regime change, a Capitol Hill shibboleth among Cheney, Perle and Wolfowitz, Lewis's ideological confreres.

Lewis's analysis here is occasionally skewed: the anti-American writings of select German intellectuals such as Rilke, Heidegger and Spengler (p. 53) are not generally read by Middle Easterners for whom London and Paris are their intellectual cosmopolises with their conduits of social thought and knowledge transmission. Besides, lofty disdain for America and things American is a venerable topos in French literature from Stendhal to Sartre (Baudrillard confessed albeit exaggeratedly for all, 'Al-Qa'ida did it, but we willed it'); and Lewis would know better the de rigueur anti-Americanisms — and subtler anti-Semitism — of the Establishment. Describing the 'aftermath'

in post-'53 Iran as 'remarkably mild', by avoiding mention of the Shah's 25-year repressive rule aided by the despised SAVAK, is gratuitous (p. 56). Moreover, the BrzezinskiBazargan handshake was confirmation for the radical students and populace of a done deal, not 'some accommodation' for, conscious of Mussadiq's removal through the CIA-MI6-sponsored coup, they suspected a complot in the offing to rehabilitate the ailing despot (p. 64).

Mobsters torched the American chancery in Islamabad upon Khomeni's broadcast calumny that Americans and Zionists (the latter included in the Ayatollah's original declaration but omitted by Lewis) had defiled the Meccan sanctuary. That demonstration, however, was not 'in support of the rebels' holed up in Mecca (p. 63). Pakistani fundamentalists could not be aware of — let alone support — the seizure of the precinct by Juhayman al-Utaybi on November 20, 1979, at the end of the pilgrimage season and the first day of 1400, the new Islamic century, since the Saudis had cut off communication links with the outside world in the immediate after-hours of the revolt. Given the signification of messianic movements by self-styled mahdis, the timing and brief examination of this and other uprisings merit notice in the useful chapter on Saudi bankrolling and Wahhabisation of activists and institutions (pp. 93-105) or in the balanced discussion on jihad (pp. 23-36). Britain, not 'Israel', is targeted in chants as 'Little Satan' in present day Iran (p. 66). 'Sinkiang' must be transliterated as Xinjiang (p. 69f.). Ibn Saud was born in 1876, not 'ca. 1880' (p. 95).

Lewis laments that the imperial impact was briefer in the Middle East; yet extremism did not decline after the departure of the colonists discredited monarchs and oil conglomerates (pp. 44, 55). Iraq, former South Yemen and the Persian Gulf oligarchies were surely bequeathed competent bureaucracies, infrastructures and armed forces but not valuable expertise in self-governance and civil society as were the successor states of British India.

The clout successfully wielded by AIPAC and other pro-Israeli pressure groups in influencing decision-making, contrasted with the feeble success of Arab and Islamic lobbies — some of which allegedly maintain links with dubious outfits abroad — gives lie to the fact that American support for Israel is predicated simply on 'ideological or sentimental' and 'strategic' considerations (p. 75). The belief that the US is not an honourable arbiter is palpable among Muslims and pervasive among others, including quite a few fair-minded Americans and Israelis who, alas, are uncharitably dismissed as anti-Semites or self-detesting Jews. Palestine is among the most conspicuous grievances for which non-Muslims in the Islamic world, perennial second-class citizens, have endured the wrath of Islamists and witnessed marked deterioration in their relations with Muslims, especially after the Afghanistan and now the Iraq campaigns. It is rash, therefore, to declare that American policy in the Middle East compared to other regions is 'a success' (p. 76). Unlike recollections of the high-handed European, the unpretentious American traveller, scholar or Peace Corps volunteer encountered immense goodwill and adulation from the masses of the Middle East and South Asia. This is now perhaps a fond memory set against the frequent kidnappings and murders during the last three decades of academics, diplomats, expatriates, journalists, marines and missionaries.

These disagreements are not registered as a belittlement of Professor Lewis's prolific erudition and customary lucidity from which many, including this reviewer, have profited. Both works, especially the latter, are sobering commentaries on the tragedy of a once brilliant, eclectic civilisation. They are

salutary reading too compared to the superficial fare dished out in America and the anti-American drivel discharged elsewhere.

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